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ABSTRACT

Studies have found that many teachers are not successful with African American students. This study grew out of the need to explore and learn from insights and knowledge of effective Title I White Reading teachers and their personal experiences, beliefs, and instructional practices. These experiences have helped the teachers bridge cultural barriers with African American students. Examples of such experiences are early educational experiences; college education and experiences which prepared them to teach culturally different students; and professional development experiences. Data collection techniques involved six interviews, which were open-ended with guided questions. The study revealed the following findings: the teachers shared many beliefs about literacy teaching and learning; and there were similarities in the teachers' goals and motivation of their African American students. (Contains 25 references.) (PM)

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A CASE STUDY OF THE PERSONAL EXPERIENCES, BELIEFS, AND INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES OF TWO EFFECTIVE TITLE I WHITE READING TEACHERS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

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Significance for Education

Studies have found that many teachers are not successful with African American students. This study grew out of the need to explore and learn from the insights and knowledge of effective Title I White Reading teachers and their personal experiences, beliefs, and instructional practices. These experiences that have helped them to bridge cultural barriers with African American students include their early educational experiences, their early life experiences, their college education and how it prepared them to successfully teach culturally different students, professional development experiences at conferences, workshops, and in-services, informal education experiences as a Title I Reading teacher, life experiences and other opportunities to learn from African American teachers regarding how to successfully teach African American students. The exploration of beliefs in reading has been limited to specific models of reading, leaving other facets of beliefs unexplored. Further, there is an overwhelming absence of effective teachers' voices and wisdom of their successful instructional practice with the population of African American students. This information may have important implications for pre- and in-service teacher preparation, including Title I. It will add to our knowledge of effective literacy instruction in primary and intermediate grade levels, which ultimately may assist researchers and scholars in the field of education. It will help us gain better knowledge of effective literacy instruction for the population of African American students.

Summary of Literature on Effective Teachers of Reading of African American Students

In summary, effective teachers of reading of minority and African American students have high expectations; optimize academic learning time; organize, manage, and plan well; match instructional objectives in reading and language arts (literacy) to the student's ability; use

active teaching methods; and maintain a pleasant and respectful classroom environment (Brophy, 1982; Cruickshank, 1985; Hawley, 1984).

Effective teachers of reading of minority, ethno-linguistically diverse, and African American students share characteristics and teacher behaviors with all other effective teachers. They are competent in subject matter; they communicate clearly when giving directions, specifying tasks and providing new information; they pace instruction appropriately; they provide all students with access to high-status knowledge; they specify task outcomes and what students must do to accomplish the tasks; they regularly monitor student progress; they stress problem solving and critical thinking; they have student knowledge; they promote active student involvement; and they provide immediate feedback on students' success when required (Brophy, 1982; Garcia, 1996; Irvine, 1992; Schuman, 1992).

Conceptual Framework

The information provided by the researcher in this case study about the ways two effective Title I White Reading teachers' personal experiences, beliefs, and instructional practices guided their successful reading instruction of African American students was grounded in Ladson-Billings' (1994) *Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy*, Irvine's (1990) *Theory of Cultural Synchronization*, Bandura's (1997) *Social Cognitive Theory* on teacher efficacy, and Moje's (1996) and Oldfather's (1994) *Scoiocultural Theory of Literacy*.

The sociocultural perspective provides a lens in which literacy, beliefs, and knowledge are understood in this study. Sociocultural theories of literacy assume that literacy is socially constructed as it is used in specific contexts for specific purposes (Moje, 1996). In literacy

learning, the interpersonal, intrapersonal, and cultural aspects of individual learning are intertwined (Oldfather, 1994). Moje (1996) added

> Each act of literacy is embedded in a network of social relations, for people use literacy as a way to make meaning for themselves and for other people. Those meanings are always contextualized by the social networks or communities in which individuals find themselves. (p. 175)

This implies a view of the classroom as a social system shared collectively by teachers and students (Powell, 1996). According to Moje (1996), the classroom is a social system defined by

> The teacher's and students' (a) beliefs about the nature of knowledge; (b) philosophies and knowledge about the discipline, teaching and learning in that discipline, and teaching and learning in general; (c) past school experiences and their role in schools and schooling; (d) home and community experiences; and (e) feelings and emotions about school and about themselves in general. (p. 175)

Thus, the instructional practices of effective teachers cannot be understood apart from its context and the meanings teachers and students attach to them.

In selecting teachers for this study, the objective was to identify teachers who have been deemed "effective" in their ability to teach reading. The criteria for defining effective reading teachers were derived from the position statement by The International Reading Association (2000) in which six critical qualities of knowledge and practice were described. These qualities are:

1. Understanding of reading and writing development and the belief that "all children can learn to read and write."

2. Continuous assessment and relating reading in the student's prior experiences.

3. Knowledge of a variety of ways to teach reading, when to use each method, and how to combine these methods into an effective program.

4. Offering a variety of materials and texts.

5. The use of flexible grouping and tailoring instruction to individual children.

6. Being good "reading coaches" or teaching strategically.

Using the IRA criteria to define "effective teachers of reading," the researcher selected two teachers and sought their permission to participate in this study. The teachers selected are both White female Title I reading teachers.

Through conversations with these teachers, the researcher concluded that both of these teachers met these criteria. In addition, they both were Title I reading teachers who primarily taught African American students. Furthermore, they were recommended for this study by the Director of the Title I Program, two Title I Program teachers, the principals of the two schools in which the Title I teachers served, and also by their peers, the other classroom teachers in their buildings based on an instrument (a peer questionnaire), utilizing Foster's method of community nomination and recommendations (1990, 1997).

Initial contact was made with each teacher for her permission and to explain broadly the purpose of the study and the procedures involved. Two participants were selected because this study utilizes qualitative case study methodology (Merriam, 1988, 1998). The University of Akron's Institutional Review Board completed the Human Subjects Review for Protection of Human Subjects in October 2002.

The researcher followed the "maximum variation sampling" (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 1990). In maximum variation sampling, the researcher looked for central themes or patterns that cut across a variety of cases (Patton, 1990). Common patterns that emerged have their value "in capturing the core experience, and central, shared aspects or impacts of a program" (Patton, p. 172).

Final selection of teachers took into consideration teacher willingness to participate and collaborate. Since this study was interested in teachers' insights and knowledge, it was important to select teachers who were willing to share their knowledge and engage in reflective thinking. The researcher also needed teachers with teaching experience that has enabled them to develop a sound theory of their teaching rooted in a rich history they could draw upon. Both have rich teaching experiences upon which to draw. This school year, Teacher #1 taught first grade Reading Recovery, Guided Reading, peer coaching, and used a classroom "pull out" model of third and fourth graders. The other, Teacher #2, taught third and fourth grade Reading Replacement classes, which was also a "pull out as needed" model.

Method

This study used a qualitative case study methodology research design. This case study examined the personal experiences and instructional practices of two Title I White Reading teachers who have been identified as effective teachers of African American students. The study was conducted in two urban elementary schools in the same school system located in a midwestern city.

Data collection techniques involved 6 interviews, which were open ended with guided questions, based on research regarding personal experiences and instructional practices of two effective Title I White reading teachers. Data collection also included the use of 8 non-participant observations, a total of 16, 6 interviews, with each participant informant making a total of 12, field notes, audio and videotaping, questionnaires, and the examination of artifacts. The data was then analyzed, coded, and interpreted by the researcher, using data analysis techniques following the Developmental Research Sequence (DRS) including: domain analysis,

structural questions, taxonomic analysis, data reduction, casual mapping, and cultural themes. Data analysis and display involved initial pattern coding, matrix, and networks. For each research question, data analysis provided a case study of each teacher followed by a cross-case analysis.

Triangulation is the use of multiple sources of data in the data collection process, to confirm emerging findings (Merriam, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994). The use of multiple methods is an attempt to secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Mathison, 1998).

This study included triangulation of interviews, field notes, and classroom audio and videotaped observations. The researcher used data reduction, and casual mapping to confirm findings to analyze the data. The researcher also used the "constant comparative method" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to develop conceptual categories of research findings.

The following research questions guided this study design and data collection procedures:

1. What kinds of reading events and practices did two effective White Title I reading teachers engage in with their African American students?

2. What are the experiences of these White teachers that have helped them to bridge cultural barriers with African American students?

3. What beliefs about literacy teaching and learning guided the teachers' instructional practices?

4. What beliefs and expectations about African American students guided the teachers' instructional practices?

Summary of Findings

Results of the Study

The researcher found after analyzing the data, major themes characterizing successful literacy/reading instruction and effective practices using culturally relevant pedagogy had emerged. Emphasis on expectations and effective classroom management showed teachers' beliefs.

Study Findings

- There were striking similarities and differences in the Title I reading models.
- There were striking similarities between the two White Title I teachers in their reading practices with their African American students.
- There were similarities and some differences in the personal experiences of these White teachers that helped them bridge cultural barriers with African American students.
- The teachers shared many beliefs about literacy teaching and learning.
- There were similarities in the teachers' goals and motivation of their African American students.
- There were striking similarities in the teachers' beliefs and expectations about African American students that guided their instructional practices.
- The findings suggested that both teachers have developed a sound theory of literacy.

Educational Implications

Teacher educators have a concomitant responsibility to look beyond the obvious and superficial and find the potential in every prospective teacher. Regardless of prospective

teachers' race, ethnicity, or life experiences, their preparation curricula should include: (a) an understanding of the nature of student-teacher relationships, the curriculum, schooling, and society; (b) active self-examination; (c) teaching strategies that model active, meaningful, culturally diverse, and ethno-linguistically appropriate student involvement; and (d) practices that communicate high expectations for all learning, actively rejecting any notions of student failure.

Of course, the same implications should hold true for pre-service teachers who specialize in the area of literacy with a concentration in reading in Title I programs. The ultimate answer in creating more effective instructional practices for underachieving ethnically different students is empowering teachers to make better decisions for themselves within their own teaching contexts. In the context of this discussion, teacher empowerment means having knowledge, will, and skill to incorporate cultural diversity into all routine teaching functions. Having the will means accepting the legitimacy of cultural differences, as well as being enthusiastic about affirming, celebrating, and using these differences to enrich the educational experiences of ethnically diverse students. Having the skill means having the ability to competently translate new knowledge about cultural and ethnic diversity and the nature of teaching functions into strategies that make instruction more effective for a wider variety of students.

As Goodlad's (1984) extensive study on schooling shows, the intellectual terrain of the classroom is laid out by teachers who play the major role of deciding what, when, where, and how students will learn.

Furthermore, teachers at all levels of schooling (including pre-service and in-service) have significant, if not total control over the selection of teaching strategies and learning

activities; evaluating students; setting goals and objectives; determining the use of classroom space; scheduling time and materials; grouping students; and selecting the content, topics, and skills that will be taught. Teachers are virtually autonomous in creating the learning environment.

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